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SUBJECT: Media Reaction: U.S.-Bangladesh Relations, Iranian
Election; Dhaka

Summary: Commenting on the visit of Under Secretary of State
Nicholas Burns, English "News Today" urges political parties
to work together to prevent the rise of an alternative
force. It also urged the government to clarify its position
on the presence of militants in the country.

On the Iranian election, Bangla "Janakantha" is concerned
about whether the new leader will carry democracy forward or
backward. The pro-Islamic "Naya Diganta" and the English
"Daily Star" welcome Ahmadinejad's victory.

1. U.S.-Bangladesh Relations

"Burns' Praise for Bangladesh"
Independent English "News Today" editorially comments
(6/28):

The United States' support to Bangladesh's development and
democracy remains crucial for stability and progress in this
country. Bangladesh should now feel comfortable with the
reaffirmation by visiting US Under Secretary Nicholas Burns'
full support of his country to Bangladesh for maintaining
its liberal democratic role and speedy economic growth. The
senior US official also appreciated Bangladesh's role in
international peace keeping as well as in fighting
terrorism. The empowerment of women has also earned Burns''
praise. In his meetings with Prime Minister Begum Khaleda
Zia and Foreign Minister M Morshed Khan Burns conveyed that
US attaches special importance to improving bilateral
relations with Bangladesh. Such remarks are important for us
because we want the United States to open its market for our
apparel products.

Bangladesh should take two US concerns seriously. Firstly,
the United States wants the political leaders to work
together to iron out their differences on national
issues.... This is the normal democratic and political
culture which is hardly followed by our politicians. So US
concern that if the political parties do not work together
people may look for the alternative which may not be good
for the country. We agree with such concern and would appeal
to our leaders to work together to address the national
issues.

The government should clarify Burns' second concern about
the presence of militants in our country. This is an
opportunity to clear the smokescreen on this issue.
Bangladesh is a victim of international propaganda about
Islamic militants in this country. Some important newspapers
reported that Bangladesh is a safe haven for the Islamic
militants who maintain links with international terrorist
groups. Since Burns is an important functionary of the state
department his impression would be very important to dispel
such unfounded fear.

The government should have invited Mr. Burns to see for
himself different countryside and meet the leaders of the
civil society to ascertain whether this country has
organized Islamic militants groups that pose any threat
either to democracy or to the United States. We hope Burns
would recommend dispatching a group of congressmen or any
watch group to see for them the situation here. It is clear
that in a democracy extremism cannot grow. Bangladesh is
undoubtedly a democratic country and it is impossible for
any extremist group to grow here. We hope Mr. Burns would go
back with this impression.

2. Iranian Election

"The Victory of a Hard-liner in Iran"
Pro-opposition Bangla language newspaper "Janakantha"
editorially comments (6/28):

The victory of Ahamadinejad has closed the way for reformists to come to the government. The victory also puts the country at risk of returning to the days of tight restrictions following the Islamic Revolution.

It is a question whether the election will carry the democratic system forward or backward.... One thing should be kept in mind: if the Iranian people want reforms, they cannot be fooled with threats from the Guardian Council or President Khatamei. Those who have ousted an autocratic rule will have to face the same consequences if they themselves establish similar autocratic rule.

"Ahamadinejad Iran's New President: Positive role in Global Politics Desired"
Pro-Islamic Bangla "Naya Diganta" editorially comments (6/28):

Some news media described the results of the Iranian elections as the victory of hard-liners who support the nuclear program. Analysts have different explanations. They say that Iranians have elected Ahamadinejad in response to the belligerent policy adopted by the West, especially the U.S., toward Iran's nuclear program. The results show that people did not accept experienced Rafsanjani's liberal policy toward the West. It cannot be denied that most of the people in the world wanted a regime change in the U.S. and Britain after the Iraq war. But the people of these countries did not agree. Therefore, it would be disrespectful to democracy if the choice of the Iranian people were not accepted.

The election in Iran is considered to be very important following the Iraq war and the situation in Lebanon and the threat to Syria. Everybody hopes that Iran under the leadership of Ahamadinejad will improve the fate of its own people and play a positive role in the region and in global politics.

"Election in Iran: People have spoken"
Independent English language newspaper "Daily Star"
editorially comments (6/27):

To some, the election of Ahamadinejad as the next president of Iran may have come as a surprise, but it must be acknowledged by all that his election reflects the majority will of the Iranian people. The outcome may not be regarded as propitious by some countries and some may have their reservations on the conduct of the elections, but let us not forget that it is their democratic process conducted through their institutions that has yielded the result.

Observers credit him with very little expertise on foreign policy matters. It appears that Ahamadinejad is in no hurry to mend fences with the west particularly the US and has made it quite clear that any development in bilateral relations will be on the principle of sovereign equality, without being dictated to by anybody. The west also fears the worst insofar as Iran's nuclear policy is concerned. The nuclear negotiations have been difficult so far, and these are likely to be more so in future.

We would like to congratulate the new Iranian president hoping for an earnest Endeavour on the part of new leadership to lead their nation into the new millennium.

Thomas